



Metro



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## Emerging best practices to operationalize racial equity in affordable housing

The regional affordable housing bond offers greater Portland an important opportunity to advance racial equity. The bond will create affordable homes to serve 12,000 people who are not currently served by the housing market, who have not had opportunities to access other public investments in affordable housing, or who live in communities at risk of displacement. Housing barriers affect all communities but have most deeply impacted communities of color. By focusing our policies and investments to benefit communities of color, we can reduce racial disparities while benefiting all disadvantaged members of our community.

The housing bond program will address historic barriers by focusing investments towards serving families and people with very low incomes. Of the 3,900 homes that will be produced through bond investments, at least 1,950 must have two or more bedrooms, and at least 1,600 will be affordable to households making 30% or below of area median income (AMI). In addition, racial equity will be advanced throughout program implementation, from who is hired to build the homes, to how people are encouraged and supported to access the homes the bond creates, to how programs are designed to serve residents.

Metro seeks to support our colleagues, partners and the broader community as we work together to implement the regional housing bond program. This document offers emerging best practices and strategies to design and implement programs that advance racial equity. We consider this a living document and welcome feedback to improve it.



## 1. Addressing structural racism

Structural racism refers to the complex system of public policies, institutional practices, and other cultural norms by which racism is developed and protected. Dismantling these systems is essential to eliminating racial disparities. We recommend multiple approaches and intentional consideration at every level of affordable housing development and program implementation.

### Suggested practices

- **Make decisions with community:** Integrally involve people of color and organizations that represent communities of color in policy and funding decisions. Actively remove barriers for organizations and communities to ensure full participation by providing stipends, scheduling events at accessible times and locations, and other supportive engagement tactics.
- **Teach equity:** Provide ongoing/continuing education equity training opportunities that include anti-racist curricula for all project partners, including building owner and management staff, resident services staff, and partners that support residents.
- **Measure and evaluate outcomes:** Set measurable goals for advancing racial equity and identify metrics for monitoring outcomes. Establish meaningful and ongoing communication with community-based organizations to review metrics and methods used to evaluate program impact. Consider evaluation as a tool to expand community engagement in the program, identify challenges and opportunities for further progress, improve program implementation to achieve identified outcomes, and celebrate accomplishments and successes.

- **Activate public support:** Provide proactive community education and engagement opportunities to inform neighbors about specific projects and build broad support for affordable housing. Demonstrate ‘good neighbor’ programming and support those who wish to see more affordable housing in the community.

## 2. Increase access for people of color

Common screening practices disproportionately screen out people of color and are incongruous with Fair Housing regulations. Practices that “screen in” rather than “screen out” applicants and affirmative marketing strategies will increase access to affordable housing opportunities for communities of color.

### Suggested practices

- **Clear information with remedy and appeal options:** Make screening criteria readily available on housing websites and in marketing materials. Provide information in multiple languages.
- **Accommodate credit scores:** Allow applicant to demonstrate financial soundness with alternate documentation. Make exceptions for medical and education debt, and when the applicant is on a feasible repayment plan. Coordinate with nonprofits that specialize in housing counseling.
- **Allow alternative documentation:** People who have had unstable housing situations or have experienced homelessness may not have retained documents. Consider additional forms of ID or documentation to satisfy application requirements. Accept references from professional contacts, a case manager, faith leader, or other personal contact if applicants cannot provide landlord references. Allow applicants additional time to secure necessary documentation while holding the apartment.
- **Look beyond histories:** Recognize that people of color are disproportionately impacted by the structural racism within the criminal justice system. Consider only recent or serious crimes that relate to the safety of the property and other tenants. Screen for criminal background only after applicant has met all other qualifications. Educate applicants on how to submit a reasonable accommodation request during the application process.



- **Offer remedy and appeal options:** If an application is denied, provide clear and direct information to applicant about the nature of the denial and options to remedy or appeal. Allow the applicant to work directly with building owner and management without having to go through the screening company.
- **Get the word out:** Work with community-based organizations that have direct and frequent contact with culturally specific communities to inform and solicit housing applications from households of color and historically marginalized communities. Be mindful of differences in media preferences when advertising. Collect data to determine if affirmative marketing strategies have been effective.
- **Provide accessibility:** Rates of disability are similar among white people and people of color; however, people of color are five times more likely than the general population to report experiencing discrimination based on disability. Set production targets for physically accessible and adaptable units and ensure that accessible units are available at the lowest tiers of affordability. Partner with service agencies to provide supportive housing – housing paired with ongoing, intensive supportive services that can address the spectrum of needs of the community.
- **Consider staffing:** Intentional staffing and programming can ensure equitable success for tenants of color. Conduct tenant meetings to gather feedback and engage tenants to foster communicative and trusting relationships between tenants and property managers. Hire staff of color and culturally specific service providers. Fund peer support programs that employ staff with lived experience to support residents.

### 3. Intentionally locate housing opportunities

Creating affordable housing in areas with good access to jobs, quality schools and mixed-income communities improves outcomes for families with low incomes, especially for children. Additionally, creating affordable housing in communities at risk of displacement often means more affordable housing where communities of color live. This can help keep communities intact by helping people stay in areas where they have family, friends, and community institutions and gathering places.



### Suggested practices

- **Connect communities to higher opportunity:** Allow for higher costs of affordable housing investments in high-opportunity areas. Understand that communities of color may define opportunity differently. Engage culturally specific and historically marginalized communities to understand location preferences and supports needed to thrive in new neighborhoods. Use marketing strategies that explicitly convey that people of color are welcome to apply.
- **Acquire and improve:** Invest in affordable housing opportunities where people of color already live by acquiring unregulated affordable housing to protect existing tenants, improve housing conditions, and ensure that programming is culturally responsive to the community.
- **Invest in the community:** Work with transit providers and transportation network companies to ensure adequate transportation options for people who live in lower-income communities. Partner with community programs to support access to opportunity, economic mobility, and quality of life in conjunction with affordable housing investments.



## 4. Creating workforce opportunities

People of color are not equally represented in construction and other professional opportunities created by affordable housing development and operations. Women represent just four percent of the construction workforce. The development and construction and management of affordable housing units represents opportunities to increase representation of people of color and women in this field.

### Suggested practices

**Improve contracting diversity:** Set goals and competitive criteria to increase diversity in contracting for projects. Use “good faith effort” requirements for outreach to MWESB contractors. Recognize contractors who exceed the hiring requirements and award them additional points on future bids. Make a plan to increase MWESB goals over time. Make particular efforts to contract with minority and women owned businesses, in addition to more readily available Emerging Small Businesses.

**Set goals for apprenticeship and workforce:** Set goals for apprenticeship and labor participation by women and people of color. Use a certified payroll and workforce reporting software program to monitor compliance with workforce diversity goals and prevailing wage compliance management. Offer admin support with reporting requirements to small firms who may not have the in-house capacity to complete required monitoring and reporting.

**Create new capacity:** Jurisdictions can help build and support a diverse workforce by joining Metro’s Construction Careers Pathways Project (C2P2), a project aimed at building capacity in the construction workforce in public investments.

**Support living wages:** Work with the labor community to create community benefits agreements that define workforce goals and commitments to wages in each project, including ongoing operations jobs.

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Arts and events  
Garbage and recycling  
Land and transportation  
Oregon Zoo  
Parks and nature

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## Hello, we’re Metro.

Metro brings people together to shape the future of greater Portland and provides places, services and tools that work best at a regional scale. Led by an elected council, this unique government gives Oregonians a voice in their community.

### Parks and nature

Metro protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat, and connects people to nature across 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas – and the Oregon Zoo.

### Land and transportation

Metro plans for new homes, jobs, transportation options and access to local businesses and parks.

### Garbage and recycling

Metro manages the garbage and recycling system and is a resource for information about safe disposal and ways to reduce waste.

### Arts and events

Metro runs the Oregon Convention Center, Portland Expo Center and Portland’s Centers for the Arts.